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in a manner that manifests how lightly it is contemplated, in too general a way. We justly censure the circumstances attending the murder of Spencer Perceval, but how is it possible to acquit as innocent, the promoters of those repeated acts of administration, that hurry on to the field, so many of their fellow-mortals : where thousands of lives are wantonly sported with, and inhumanly sacrificed to the vain purposes of the most ambitious pursuits, and selfish interests of a misguided state-policy.

I long much to behold human nature possessing sound renovation, and properly supporting a real consistency of character and conduct, which never can be expected to take place, so long as the passions are unsubdued and suffered to remain predominant.

N.S.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ON IMPROPER COMPANY.

AMONGST the incongruities of mankind, I have often had occasion to observe, that none of the lower order are so apt to go astray through inebriety, as those whom nature has been pleased to gift with some talent above the level of mankind.

The origin of this depravity, doubtless, may be traced to a number of causes, but to none more than improper company ; and I believe it will be generally acceded to, that none are more improper than those frequenters of public houses, often, but certainly improperly, termed *good company*. Here, perhaps, it is necessary to observe, that in the plebeian walks of life, if persons are any way distinguished for genius, their company becomes rather courted ; they rarely, if ever, are objects of envy to their equals, who usually

vie in kind attentions towards them, and if amongst company, mistaken friendship prevails so much, that they are rarely suffered to remove, till intoxicated.

It does not require what may be termed a constellation of talents to make a person's company be sought after ; the contrary is often evident, for singing a song in a tolerable manner, or a happy knack of telling a story, or even relating a common place anecdote, answers this purpose ; and those, or such like trifles, have often caused the contracting of habits, which were never relinquished but with existence.

It is generally acknowledged that there is no way so good to elucidate an observation as example ; and for the purpose of strengthening the above remarks, I shall subjoin some account of a young man with whom I was acquainted, the outlines of whose history will too fully prove the truth of what has been advanced.

This person, whom I shall call Alexis, was bred in an obscure village in the county of Antrim. His parents were rather in an humble station ; therefore, though their only son, his education was confined to a few months at school ; he, however, improved himself much, by attending night schools, and reading select authors, which he obtained by becoming member of a book-club.

Amongst the works which now passed through his hands, were Johnson's poems, of which he became a zealous admirer. In perusing books he now spent those hours that could be spared from labour, and which had been till lately so far mispent at dancings, &c. When in general company, which was now seldom, he appeared less lively than formerly ; but if the company was to his liking, he was fond, on the

slightest opportunity, of repeating quotations from some of the works he had read; but as he mentioned no author, they usually either passed unobserved, or were deemed to be his own, having got the name of a *reading fellow*.

While time was passing in this manner, the works of Robert Burns fell in his way, of which he became greatly enamoured: particularly of those parts where the customs and manners of the Scottish peasantry are so finely and justly described. What rendered those parts so fascinating to him, was, that they bore not a little resemblance in phrases, manners, and customs, to those which existed in his native village. To be brief, no other work had pleased him so much, and he now resolved to taste of the Castilian spring, and at least to chirp in the groves of Parnassus.

From this time rhyming became in some degree, his trade, and constant amusement; and as Burns had first awakened his muse, of course the Scottish dialect became the style in which he hoped at least to be his rival. Not that he had a correct knowledge of the Scottish tongue, but if he made a slip, it was much less observable than in the English language, in which he was not even a grammatical scholar.

The first effusions of his muse were songs, and elegies: the former most numerous, and chiefly treating of love: in which were introduced, the blind boy Cupid, with all his usual appendages—as hearts, darts, doves, loves, flames, pains, &c.; and in short, his whole train was so complete, that not even a quiver or bow-string was forgotten.

It is a strong proof of the sociability of mankind, that there are very few recorded, who have desired to enjoy their literary labour in private: and Alexis being no Junius,

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soon began to repeat some of his verses to acquaintances, all of whom, whatever might be their private sentiments, expressed a favourable opinion. Some, perhaps with real partiality to his efforts, complimented him much; and the news spreading of his being turned poetaster, he became both the object of wonder and derision, for “some believed him wondrous wise, and some believed him mad.”

As he considered his friends the most discerning part of the community, the tattle which he learned was passing, gave him little uneasiness, and served only as a stimulus; and he now resolved that some of his favourite pieces should appear in print, at least in the poets corner of a newspaper, which he had learned had been the channel by which many great men had first introduced their works to the public. This design was immediately carried into execution, and succeeded to his utmost wishes; similar trials having been made afterwards, usually met with the same success.

The opinion of his friends, and I may add his own, respecting his poetical abilities, were both raised at the same time; and he now resolved to publish the whole in a small volume by subscription, his friends kindly offering to support him with all their interest. Pleased with the idea of appearing as an author, and the hope of bettering his condition in life, a prospectus was immediately printed and distributed amongst his friends, who exerted themselves so heartily in his behalf, that in a few weeks the work went to press accompanied by a numerous list of subscribers.

In bringing the work forward, his acquaintances considerably increased, not a few of whom were of the *thirsty* kind; with them he spent many nights, and I may add, more

N B R

ings, they rarely separating till Aurora began to make her appearance. After these orgies, remorse always succeeded, which was followed by a resolution to reform, which resolution was sure to be broken the first time he met his companions. To be short, before his book made its appearance, he had contracted new acquaintances, new habits, and new debts; the landlord of the house which he frequented having credited him on the strength of the subscription.

The work at length made its appearance; in the delivery of which, he became still more exposed to company, especially as he had now got into the system to *treat*, and be *treated*. His bottle companions therefore let no opportunity slip, as they were sure he had money; and they now often paid their share of the reckoning with *flattering* him, or what they did not improperly call *tickling*.

This system soon rivetted what custom had already made familiar, and it might be said with truth, that the first and last act of each day was frequenting the miniature temples of Bacchus—alias, dram shops.

The bills of printer, &c. had now to be paid, also that of the landlord of the inn; both were larger than he had expected, particularly the latter, who perhaps, like other landlords, had one price for ready money, and another for *score*.

He now found his expectations completely disappointed, for instead of realizing a small sum, he found he was scarce worth a shilling, if he excepted some desperate debts of subscribers, and those copies which still remained on hand; for not a few subscribers refused to take the

book on various pretences, most of which were so very vague, that it was evident they had set down their names without the least intention of taking it!

Company and whiskey for some time buried his chagrin in a kind of temporary oblivion, during which time, several of his sincere friends strove to rouse him to a sense of his duty, stating the gross impropriety of his conduct, which he acknowledged. But, alas! he was gone too far, the worthless wretches with whom he associated had so unmannered him, that he appeared resigned to his fate. He was even sometimes several weeks without leaving the public house, usually sleeping in an arm chair which was placed by the kitchen fire.

His constitution, which he had been thus sapping some time, now gave way all at once, and he sunk into an inflexible stupidity; a physician was called in by his aged parents, but in vain; and after lingering a few weeks, his soul took its departure for that land, "from whence no traveller returns."

Such was the end of Alexis, who, by a thoughtless attachment to company, contracted habits which proved, what may justly enough be called, his untimely ruin. His principles were pure and philanthropic, and his writings evince, that he possessed some real genius, which only required time and attention to mature it; and that he would have been an ornament to any society, if possessed even of common resolution. But, alas! like his archetype, habitual drinking "laid him low, and stained his name."

R.

Rockville.